

# ICPS newsletter®

## Another sign of sustainable development: environmental justice

***October saw the new issue of the Local Governance Brief come out in its Russian edition. The publication is put out by the International Centre for Policy Studies for the Open Society Institute's "Local Government Initiative." This issue of the Brief looks at the issue of environmental justice, a new, progressive concept that is a key sign of sustainable development***

Environmental injustices are obvious. While the poor and minorities often live amid the worst environmental conditions, the more affluent members of a society tend to enjoy isolated enclaves of cleaner air and better water. Environmental justice—the fair distribution of environmental benefits and hazards—is a bold new way to consider human rights and environmental opportunities in CEE and NIS countries.

### A brilliant new concept

Environmental justice is a striking concept. It clarifies the relationship between the environment and human rights. It makes us focus on equality and fairness—getting our fair share of what the world has to offer, literally. In a world with environmental justice, there should be an equitable distribution of clean water, clean air, decent shelter, and freedom from significant exposure to pollutants. These benefits must be accessible across all social strata and should not simply be reserved for the wealthy few.

Without doubt, environmental justice can be a powerful idea. It can take root in the hearts and minds of people and promote action. It can open doors that were once invisible or closed.

In short, environmental justice has great potential to improve individual and community life throughout the former communist region. It can help us focus on such important areas as: promoting the public interest, averting destructive conflicts, making efficient use of resources, stabilizing community health, and building local development capacity.

As with all new approaches, however, ensuring environmental justice poses

challenges. Those in leadership positions must find creative ways to help their communities overcome prejudice. Existing laws may need improvement to promote justice, because the work of identifying and measuring environmental injustices is difficult. And local governments may be hard-put to add a new problem to their overloaded agendas.

But environmental justice does not have to be a burden. As local governments in the region deal with the trials of transition and limited resources, they can find that working for environmental justice actually provides them with new opportunities. Citizens and officials can use environmental justice as a framework for clarifying and examining problems associated with both environmental protection and human rights. These efforts can open up new pathways to improve our lives and our towns.

### Environmental justice in a broader context

In fact, serious developmental and environmental problems are not only the concern of our neighbors. They are happening in our own backyards. These problems are dividing our cities and villages and keeping us from reaching our capacity. The fact that CEE communities are fighting over access to drinking water and facing higher-than-average infant mortality rates indicates that the same problems exist in Europe, even if they are smaller in scale than elsewhere.

Sustainable development is development driven by a triple bottom line: economic, social and environmental concerns. One of the implications of this concept is the recognition that, in long-term economic growth, social cohesion and

environmental protection must go hand in hand. In other words, economic and social cohesion directly influence the environment. Development without compensation, cohesion, and collaboration can lead to a society in which more and more people suffer the adverse impacts of the exclusive lifestyles of a shrinking group at the top. Poverty and marginalization thus represent substantial threats to all of us.

Economic and social cohesion policies support marginalized populations and open space for them to participate more fully in the community. Environmental justice provides the background arguments needed to make changes in cohesion policies and adjustments at the EU, national, and regional levels. The distribution of environmental harms and benefits is a fundamental right that few will challenge.

Addressing individual cases of environmental injustice is important, but we should not forget the need for more system-wide changes in order to avoid the violation of human rights and create decent living conditions for people, regardless of class or color. Local governments, in cooperation with other players, can work to bring about policy changes that will improve the living conditions of marginalized communities and majority populations.

### Potential indicators of environmental justice

#### *Economic and social indicators*

National and regional statistics can be a good source for certain data:

- Per capita income
- Level of employment and unemployment
- Distribution of national/EU funds
- Distribution of investment into transport/water/electricity

- Land ownership.

National and local opinion surveys—disaggregated by income, neighborhood, gender, religion, ethnicity, and so on—can be a good source for additional data:

- Environmental plans and programs
- Strength of formal and informal networks
- Involvement of stakeholders in decision making
- Rates and continuity of public investment
- Access to and participation in the decision-making process
- Quality of sewage, waste treatment and disposal services.

Health statistics and administrative records can be a good source for other data:

- Rates for cancer, asthma, chronic bronchitis, emphysema and other respiratory diseases
- Access to quality healthcare
- Access to health-related education.

#### *Environmental indicators*

Administrative records can be a good source for environmental data:

- Distance from environmental risks
- Air pollution levels
- Water quality
- Soil contamination
- Residential segregation (distance from the city/village)
- Transport infrastructure (airports, highways).

Public information reviews or peer assessments can be a good source for access quality data:

- Availability of local cadastre and housing categories in land-use plans
- Availability of targeted, tailored environmental information
- Access to environmental information
- Access to natural resources
- Access to waste-water treatment
- Quality of construction (health and safety)

- Access to recreational areas
- Access to water and sewage systems and sanitary maintenance
- Access to environmental education.

#### *Legal indicators*

Surveys or expert interviews—disaggregated by gender, age, social status, occupation, and so on—can be a good source for legal data:

- Provisions of UNECE's Aarhus Convention on Access to Information, Public Participation in Decision-making and Access to Justice in Environmental Matters
- Legislation or common laws that make financial institutions directly liable for environmental damage associated with their customers
- Law enforcement
- Level of personal security
- Legality (possession of permits to register, property rights, permanent residence)

- Accessibility of legal instruments to defend the alienation of ownership
- Capacity to formulate and defend own interests.

Administrative records can be a good source for additional data:

- Proportion of positive and negative court decisions concerning environmental problems
- Number of legal initiatives. ■

*The Local Governance Brief is distributed free in Russian as "Gosudarstvennoye upravlenie v perekhodnykh ekonomikakh" by ICPS. To receive your copy, please contact Andriy Starytskiy by phone at (380-44) 236-4477 or via e-mail at [marketing@icps.kiev.ua](mailto:marketing@icps.kiev.ua). You can also order the publication on-line at <http://www.icps.kiev.ua/eng/subscribe/>. Back issues of this publication can be found at <http://www.icps.kiev.ua/publications/lg.html>. We appreciate any feedback that you would like to provide on our website regarding the new look of this publication.*

### ***Political Commentary #17—hot off the presses***

The first round of the presidential election was a draw. Viktor Yushchenko has a better chance than Viktor Yanukovych of winning the second round. The opposition candidate has more sympathizers, the support of the Socialist Party, whose candidate came third, and a more convincing campaign.

Still, the Administration candidate continues to control the inside track, with leverage over the electoral commissions, including the Central Electoral Commission, and control of the police and Special Forces. In other words, the risk that the election will be disrupted remains fairly high.

Russia, which believes that Mr. Yanukovych will maintain Mr. Kuchma's pro-Russian policies, actively supported the Administration's heir-apparent during the final crunch before Election Day. The culmination of this support was a high-profile visit by Vladimir Putin to Kyiv, complete with a live television interview for Ukrainian audiences.

The US and EU focused their efforts on the fight for an honest election and increased diplomatic pressure. The result of this election is likely to

determine the further development of relations between Ukraine and key foreign policy partners.

The Government and the National Bank of Ukraine have been putting every effort into controlling prices and the dollar exchange rate. They have been using a mix of market and administrative approaches, but the latter have had the upper hand. On the initiative of the opposition, the Verkhovna Rada raised the minimum living standard, revenging itself against the Government for its pre-election pension rises. The legislature decided to postpone the vote on the 2005 Budget, which looked doomed in any case, until after the election of the new president.

The economy continues to grow rapidly, although there are already signs that it has peaked. Growing inflation is the first factor pointing to a possible slowdown. The Budget revenue share of GDP continues to shrink. The lowering of tax rates for both individuals and corporations failed to draw much capital out of the shadow economy.

*For the full story, read Political Commentary #17 (November 2004). [www.icps.com.ua/eng/publications/pc.html](http://www.icps.com.ua/eng/publications/pc.html)*

**icps newsletter** is a weekly publication of the International Centre for Policy Studies, delivered by electronic mail. To be included in the distribution list, mail your request to: [marketing@icps.kiev.ua](mailto:marketing@icps.kiev.ua).

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